The Arts in Psychotherapy 80 (2022) 101921

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The Arts in Psychotherapy

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/artspsycho

Practicing in an expanded paradigm: Case examples and ethical anchors for creative arts therapists working in community-based social justice contexts

Maitri Gopalakrishna [1]

Parivarthan Counselling Training and Research Centre, Bangalore, India

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Social justice
Community
Ethics
Kattaikkuttu
Drama therapy
Therapeutic performance
Anti-oppressive drama therapy
Intersectional drama therapy
Drama therapy in India

ABSTRACT

This article builds on the body of knowledge that calls for an expansion of the frame of creative arts therapy practice beyond and outside the paradigms of conventional psychotherapy. It offers three diverse case examples from the practice of the author in India as a basis for developing potential ethical anchors when practicing in an expanded frame that includes community-based social-justice paradigms. By analyzing the nature of the contract, the foundations of care work and the role of the facilitator, the article explores and articulates certain useful questions and ethical anchors for CATs hoping to work in this expanded paradigm. These include (1) Being part of an ecosystem of care for collective liberation (2) Learning, critical self-reflection and radical (self) care (3) Three levels of collaboration (4) Power, language and representation. The article closes with a rationale for an expanded paradigm particularly in these politically precarious times.

Introduction

Conventions and standards of practice from mainstream psychotherapy and counselling continue to form the dominant frame within which most creative arts therapists practice. For some years now a small number of consistent voices within the creative arts therapies (CATs) have made a case for using social justice and indigeneity as frames to understand distress and intervention. Among these are scholars/practitioners who advocate the use of intersectionality as an analytical framework in the CATs (Sajnani et al., 2017; 2019; Talwar, 2010, 2019; Kuri, 2017; Williams, 2016; Lu & Yuen, 2012; Hadley, 2013; among others). There has also been growing scholarship in understanding how the CATs meet indigenous healing art practices, contexts and clients (Soon & K.M., 2016; Lu & Yuen, 2012; Cameron, 2010; Napoli, 2019; Makanya, 2014; among others). Both of these trends have challenged the conventional individualistic notions of psychotherapy as limited and limiting, as well as helped expand understanding and practice within our fields. At the same time, authors have highlighted critical considerations on cultural competence, responsibility and dangers of (re) colonization and appropriation (Makanya, 2014; Napoli, 2019; Sajnani, 2012; Cameron, 2010; amongst others).

In this article, I build on this body of knowledge that calls for an expansion of the frame of creative arts therapy practice beyond and outside of the paradigm of conventional psychotherapy. I use three case examples from my own practice as a basis for developing potential ethical anchors when moving beyond the paradigm of conventional psychotherapy and expanding to include community-based social-justice paradigms. I draw on the work of the other creative arts therapists mentioned above and a few foundational texts from critical pedagogy and community theatre that speak to the complexities of social location, oppression and the ethics of facilitative care work. By drawing on work outside the CATs, I acknowledge that we have much to gain by looking to allied fields that have, in many cases, had longer engagement with the social justice paradigms to art-based facilitative care work, than the CATs. Fields, such as teaching artistry, participatory art and areas of facilitative social work, offer interesting insights, however at the moment, they are beyond the scope of my current exploration for this article.

The article begins with three case examples where the context and the nature of my facilitative care work coupled with my own social location as an upper caste, Hindu urban Indian woman drama therapist, forced me to reimagine my role as therapist and the framework of my practice. The three cases include a performance making process that I was part of in rural South India, work I did with women physicists from countries with low (or no) infrastructure for physics, and a project involving a series of reflective spaces organized in Bangalore during widespread protests in late 2019. All three case examples involved mental health care work outside of traditional frameworks of therapy in

E-mail address: mgopalakrishna@gmail.com.
[1] Postal Address: 53 Dodsworth Enclave, Whitefield, Bangalore, 560066, India.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2022.101921
Received 15 December 2021; Received in revised form 2 May 2022; Accepted 7 May 2022
Available online 11 May 2022

a context with a clear political agenda. In the first two cases, I am a social outsider to the communities in which I was invited to work in. The third case, though it grew in scope, began as a response to a need experienced by myself and others around me– members of my own community. Through analysing the examples, I articulate useful questions and possible ethical anchors as we undertake such mental health concerns that are outside of the frame of conventional psychotherapy. The article closes with a rationale for an expanded paradigm particularly in these politically precarious times.

Working with women in kattaikkuttu

"Kattaikkuttu is a rural, Tamil language-based form of theatre that integrates music with song and spoken text, dance and acting. Performances are usually based on episodes from Indian mythological epic, the Mahabharata (Gopalakrishna et al., forthcoming; Kattaikkuttu Sangam, 2021). Performances run through the night and occur in common outdoor, open-air spaces. Kattaikkuttu is traditionally a male-only form and training is passed down intergenerationally within families and close relations. In 2002, an association of Kattaikkuttu performers started a school for children from all caste and gender backgrounds. Here, they were taught the art form alongside their academic education. The school also had its own performing company which broke barriers by having girls perform on stages for the first time (De Bruin, 2020; Gopalakrishna et al., forthcoming) (Figs. 1–3).

Within the protection of the school, several girls and young women were able to develop themselves as performers and teachers of the form.

Fig. 1. A still from a traditional Kattaikkuttu performance- the Marriage of Draupadi. PC: N.Senthil Kumar.

Fig. 2. working with babies and dogs in tow; PC: Hanne M. De Bruin.

Fig. 3. A performance from the opening show of TAVAM; PC: Hanne M. De Bruin.

However, as they got older, the women experienced pressure from their families to get married and take up more conventional roles. There is a profound stigma for women performers on the rural Tamil stage.

> …moral concern over women's movement in public feeds into the dominant ideology of the 'home and the world' as separate spheres of propriety for women and men respectively. Women who conduct business in the public sphere are suspect, a suspicion charged with the particular cruelty reserved for accusations of prostitution. Many Tamil terms for actress are also common terms for denoting a whore or prostitute…. (Seizer, 2005, p. 4).

Seizer's research is with female artists in a genre of rural Tamil performance called Special Drama. Yet, many of her insights are applicable to the stigma against women in the Kattaikkuttu genre as well. Many women in Kattaikkuttu have experienced sexual and verbal harassment. This gender element forms an additional layer to low status that Kattaikkuttu as a form occupies by virtue of being a form practiced and enjoyed by lower caste rural audiences. This leads to low wages and recognition (De Bruin, 2000; De Bruin, 2020; Gopalakrishna et al., forthcoming). Thus, women in Kattaikkuttu find themselves at the intersection of caste and gender oppressions that act as significant barriers to their right to engage in their professions with dignity and safety.

In 2021, a group of five women Kattaikkuttu artists– S.Tamilarasi, R. Mahalakshmi, K.Venda, A.Bharathi and S.Srimathy– decided to start working together on performances and workshops and eventually perhaps create a Women's Kattaikkuttu Company. They approached the Kattaikkuttu Association and former school management who administratively and creatively agreed to extend their support. They reached out to me to also play a facilitative role. My longstanding association with this performing community (dating back to 2004) in many capacities, lent me their trust and familiarity. My own location as an urban, upper-caste woman who spoke broken Tamil was something we had

played with often over the years. I was a peculiar outsider-inside deemed suitable to this task.

Of the five women, three were married, two had babies, one was pregnant and two were in college. They lived in different villages spread out over a distance of 40 kilometres from each other. Our first few meetings happened on zoom. However, they proved to be ineffective owing to issues with connectivity and internet access. Bus travel, childcare and home responsibilities meant that meeting on a regular schedule was challenging. In some cases, certain members of the household were unaware that these women were still performing. Thus, arriving at a way to work and rehearse together took much flexibility, creativity and clever subversion. We decided that 4-day residencies at the Kattaikkuttu Association Performing Arts Centre every month would be the most practical way to work. The women found allies in their homes with whom they could be open and who would support them in obtaining permission from other household members through half-truths and strategic omissions. They brought their children to the residency so we worked between feeds, naps and took turns minding the babies.

Through their work in the first residency, the group decided that they would make an original performance about the challenges they faced in being women Kattaikkuttu performers. In my own theatre devising work, a theme/idea would be followed by material generation and then crafting and structuring of performance. Yet this group began the process by creating a performance outline. They seemed to need the structure of a performance to be able to explore but they, interestingly, were open to discard the structure and start from scratch. Thus, every day we met; we began by constructing a new performance structure and then sharing life experiences to see how they would fit into that structure. Secondly, scheduling rarely went by the clock. While this was initially frustrating to me, I learnt to fall in step soon and see the hours of drinking tea, chatting and feeding babies as part of the process of care that would facilitate the performance.

The performance itself had to toe a line between self-expression and strategic self-protection. P. Rajagopal was a senior Kattaikkuttu actor and teacher to the performers. He, along with Hanne M.de Bruin, ran the Performing Arts Centre and were founders of the Kattaikkuttu Association. He has great standing in the community and was a strong supporter to the project. One of the initial performance ideas was to make parallels between the story of Draupadi (a central female character in the Mahabharata) and women in Kuttu. When the group brought the idea to Rajagopal, he voiced strong reservations against it and the group conceded. Later, I questioned Rajagopal about this. He said, "Draupadi had five husbands. If you liken yourself to her, the audience will ask if they too are okay to have five husbands…. Maitri, to your city audiences you can say you are Draupadi and there will be no uproar– but here, we don't mess with the Mahabharatham unless we are ready to fight'' (P. Rajagopal, personal communication, July 25, 2021). I understood that the act of being on stage itself was such a challenge to the status quo that the women needed to be careful in and with the piece—the parallels they drew, their treatment of the epic characters. I also understood that I was not privy to the cultural nuances and specificities needed to ensure this kind of veiled speaking up. Therefore, it was critical to solicit the help of allies like Rajagopal in the process and be aware of the limits of my scope of practice.

My role in the project was to facilitate the group in concretizing their vision and a plan for its execution. I also realised later that one of my tasks was to be able to hold space for their desires and wishes (even those that were deemed inappropriate by their cultural location). My outsider-inside location made it possible for me to advocate for the inclusion of many of the group's desires and wishes in the performance piece that was eventually directed by Rajagopal and De Bruin. Infact, the group members often asked me to play a go-between role between them and Hanne and Rajagopal for matters of logistics or content. I was happy to play this part understanding that it was one way of strategically using my location to benefit the needs of the group. Yet I was careful to only do this when asked so as to respect the agency of the group.

The group had five residencies and I was present for three. They developed a 75-minute piece called TAVAM (Srinivasaraghavan, 2021) that has now been performed to both rural and urban audiences. The Kattaikkuttu Women's Dream Project continues and I continue to make myself available to them as a resource, an ally and an advocate which includes fundraising and publicity.

Working with women in physics

The gender gap in the sciences and particularly in physics has been recorded across the globe. In 2012 in the United States women earned less than 17% percent of PhD degrees in physics. (American Physical Society, 2021; Ivie & Tesfaye, 2012). Women in physics also reported having less access to resources such as funding, lab space, clerical support etc (Ivie & Tesfaye, 2012). Widespread experiences of sexual harassment, lack of encouragement, missing role models, hostile work environment, slow career progression and salary gaps have been recorded in global surveys on women in science as well as by studies on women in physics (Ivie & Tesfaye, 2012; Roy et al., 2020). These barriers often lead to increased stress, mental health distress and women dropping out of physics altogether (Figs. 4–6).

There is a growing movement for women in physics led by senior women physicists who have managed to achieve tenure and seniority despite the barriers. One such physicist is Dr. Shobhana Narasimhan from Bangalore, India. Dr. Narasimhan attributes her success to having caste, socio economic privilege and the benefit of having grown up within an elite science research institute where her father was a mathematician, in addition to being good at science. It was clear that women who were dealing with other oppressions and in less fertile ecosystems would have a far greater uphill trek and more likely to suffer mental health and social distress in the process.

Dr. Narasimhan, with other senior physicists, used their current positions of influence to advocate for and organise a week-long workshop series for women in physics from the developing world. These workshops are organized by the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) and hosted in Trieste (Italy) and Kigali (Rwanda) in alternate years. There are usually about 70 participants in each series who are early career physicists from over 40 countries. In 2021, the workshop series went online and had 140 participants. While anyone from a "developing nation" is welcome to apply, the organisers give preference to those in countries with limited or no infrastructure for scientific research and who seem to be in the most hostile environments with least social capital.

The aims of the workshop series are (1) to create a space where

Fig. 4. A still from the ice breaker session.

Fig. 5. Working through Challenges in action. PC: Shobhana Narasimhan.

Fig. 6. The women that took over the building! PC: International Centre for Theoretical Physics.

women could share experiences (2) acquire skills to rise in their careers (3) form a community that can support one another. The series include sessions on publishing scientific papers, writing CVs, making presentations, talks by inspiring role models etc. In 2015, I had been facilitating a series of women's groups to work through the residues of childhood sexual abuse. This work drew the attention of the organisers and I was invited to facilitate drama therapy groups as part of the workshop series. I was tasked with helping participants share, explore and work through the challenges in their workplaces and the psychosocial impact of being women in this male dominated field, layered with other socio-political realities/oppressions in their lives. I facilitated sessions in person in 2015, 2017, 2019 and online in (ICTP applied Physics, 2019; Menga, 2021).

The groups were diverse in terms of race, class, age, cultural background, ability, sexual orientation and so on. I myself came from a vastly different world. I identified my first task to be the creation of a space that could hold the commonalities and the differences, be safe enough to be vulnerable yet playful. I was upfront about my location and my competencies and willing to learn about the worlds of the participants. I led three sessions in the week. The first was an ice-breaker for the whole group. The second was an in-depth session that involved my working with sub-groups to explore and process challenges. The third was a closing articulation (in action) of what the group deemed was the culture of physics.

The overarching framework to the sessions was drawn from the integrative five phase model (Emunah, 1994) and theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 1985). Activities within the sessions included games, sociometry, scene work, dramatic enactments, image theatre, forum theatre, self-sculpts and so on. I came prepared with a range of possible dramatic structures that I could offer to participants based on the nature of the issue or the texture of their sharing. Experiences of sexual harassment, social isolation, negotiating family commitments in a system that was designed for men, depression and imposter syndrome were shared and dramatically worked with. The experiences illuminated the intersections of various oppressions and challenges. For instance, in 2015, a participant from Palestine, began an enactment by staring out of the large glass windows onto the picturesque Adriatic Sea and said "freedom. You have freedom here; my people don't have this." The question of what it meant to practice physics as a woman in an active war-zone was one that needed a dramatic structure that could hold layered realities, desires and distresses at the same time. It also called on the group to witness and hold without trying to offer solutions or claiming to understand because this was not a shared experience. We drew on elements of playback theatre (Salas, 1996) within a group dramatic enactment.

The drama sessions were well received and seemed to meet all three aims of the workshop series. Participants felt a sense of validation, belonging and community, increased confidence, both personally and professionally, they gained insights and strategies to workplace challenges. There was a great deal of self-disclosure and bonding and the drama sessions seem to set the tone of an environment of care through the series. Many participants have gone on to start/join initiatives that could support women and other marginalized groups in science in their home countries (Narasimhan, 2019).

It was only when I saw the perplexed faces of the other physicists at the institute, did I understand how radical the act of programming drama into a workshop for physicists was. One of the insights shared in images during the third drama therapy session on the culture of physics was that intellect, rationality and individual achievement are privileged over emotions and relationships to such an extent that anyone needing emotional support is deemed weak. The sense of isolation that women in physics experience as a result of being the only woman in their departments is considered unimportant and not significant enough to affect their science. By programming nine hours of drama therapy into the 3 weeks of workshops, the organisers foregrounded a relational, emotional and creative care perspective that radically challenged the dominant culture within physics.

During my time at ICTP in 2017, the man at the front desk told me that he had never seen this much colour, these many women or heard this much laughter in his fifteen years working at ICTP. "The women have taken over the building!" he said, with humour tinged with indignation. I couldn't help thinking that surely the building should be theirs. If drama therapy can help in the subversion of power structures to claim their space and take over buildings, then that is, in my opinion, worthwhile work.

Facilitating spaces to reflect

At the end of 2019, the Indian government enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC).[2] This prompted widespread protests across the country by groups asserting

[2] The CAA would provide a pathway for Indian citizenship for individuals who are from persecuted religious minorities, i.e. Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis or Christians, from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Individuals from persecuted Islamic sects in these countries would be ineligible as would individuals facing religious persecution in other, non-Islamic neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Sri Lanka. It was the first-time religion was being used as a criterion for granting Citizenship in India. The NRC is a proposed registry of all citizens and the purpose of which is to identify and deport illegal immigrants.

that the act and register are discriminatory and will be used as tools of oppression against Muslims. At the same time there were pro-CAA and NRC rallies with many groups asserting that the act and register did not target Indian Muslims. Police response to the anti-CAA protests were strong, violent and included indiscriminate detentions and arrests. The narratives around these protests propagated by mainstream and social media were equally strong. Conversations on community WhatsApp groups and in public spaces indicated that people were being driven to urgently take a position for or against (Fig. 7).

Many of my friends and colleagues, myself included, were actively engaged in the protests, but also experiencing the emotional and relational impact of the polarized environment. We longed for a space to reflect outside our own echo chambers where we could listen to ourselves and one another. We hoped that this space could hold complexity and contradiction moving away from polarizing singular narratives (Adichie, 2009). We also hoped that such a space could help us engage with the emotions evoked by the political situation and deemphasize cognitive space of thoughts, information and opinion. We believed that engaging with these emotional and relational aspects with care, would enable clearer and more responsible action.

It began with one collaborator (arts educator/ researcher) and I, hosting one such space to reflect in a community arts space in the city. Soon, the facilitator team grew to include other arts and mental health facilitators (creative arts therapists, community arts practitioners, playback artists, theatre of the oppressed practitioners, group counsellors, social workers etc). Together, the facilitator team arrived at a common structure that left enough room for each facilitator to customize the design based on their own practices and context and needs of the group. The common structure included:

(1) an opening activity to gather the group and do introductions
(2) setting the frame and intention for the session as below and checking with participants if it is ok and if anything needs to be altered or changed–
  (a) Acknowledging differences in the room—Political stands/ opinion (spectrum), other affiliations—gender, religions, regional.
  (b) Not about convincing or moving anyone's position. At the same time, acknowledging that through this conversation your position may shift
  (c) Not about clarifying facts about CAA
  (d) Acknowledging internal instability that we are carrying… that has come up in response to the political situation– what we see, read, experience.
  (e) To engage with the emotional, relational aspects of ourselves with care so that we can hold the position and conviction and act upon it responsibly and powerfully. There is a space that we feel exists that is not direct political action but that enables clearer and more responsible political action. This session fits into that space.
(3) taking the temperature of the group (through spectrograms for example)
(4) embodied/creative explorations (through fluid sculptures for example) to explore the themes that came up in the previous exercise
(5) sharing
(6) closing ritual/activity

Between November 2019 to March 2020, such spaces to reflect were offered in different parts of the city on a weekly basis, facilitated in different languages. As time went by, word of the spaces began to spread and the diversity within the spaces also increased to include individuals from different social backgrounds and those who did not consider themselves political. The sessions were free of cost but we set out a donation box and many participants chose to donate. The money raised was shared between facilitators and the venue. The weekly spaces continued until COVID-19 and the resultant lock down necessitated their closure.

Participants (including myself) reported feeling less anxious and isolated at the end of the session. Those who were actively engaged in the protests felt like the space allowed them an opportunity to regather their energies (See Fig. 8). Participants felt enriched by others, connected with a sense of solidarity and cared for. In some cases, participants chose to share their political alignment, but as it was not a requirement, many participants chose to leave things ambiguous. We believed it was important to allow this ambiguity to exist and therefore had to carefully facilitate encounters and questioning between participants. Many participants chose to come back using it as a regular processing space in their lives.

It is important to note the moment in time and the context when we ran these spaces to reflect. 2019, marked the beginning of the second term of the current right-wing government in India. The CAA legislation was one of the first that was obviously discriminatory. The protests were widespread and notable because they were led by Muslim women challenging the stereotype of Muslim women as being confined to the home (Alam, 2021). Care was foregrounded in many ways. For instance, meals were cooked and shared at protest sites, and community child care was set up. There was also a strong presence of poetry and the arts at the

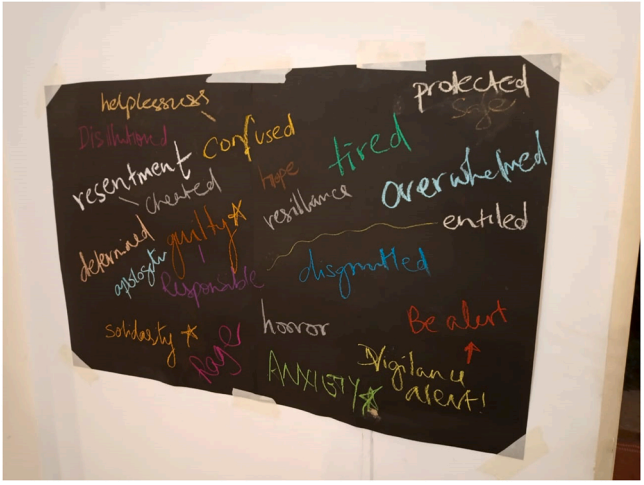

Fig. 7. The different emotions in the room.

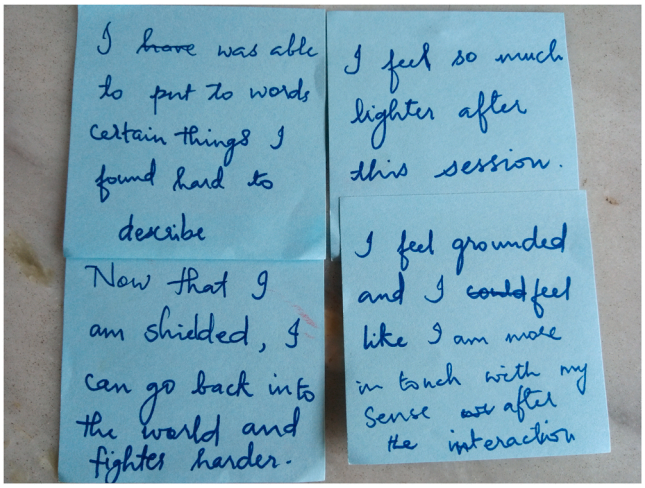

Fig. 8. feedback from a participant after a session.

protests (Alam, 2021). The protests, the counter protests and the police and state's response to the protest received fervent media/social media coverage causing people who would ordinarily not be involved, to get involved. The spaces to reflect that we facilitated in Bangalore fit into this context.

Today, in March 2022, the atmosphere is rather different. We have had many more blatantly discriminatory laws/actions, the anti-Muslim and upper caste Hindu supremacy rhetoric and consequent action is dominant and normalized. In today's context the spaces to reflect format of 2019 feels almost naive and unsafe. Some colleagues have changed the format to online listening circles with advanced sign-ups, others are in conversation about underground care spaces for those in the forefront of political clashes. The facilitator network created during spaces to reflect now serves as coordination relay unit for direct relief work during the pandemic, referrals, and continued collaboration on projects. The need for collaboration across artists, mental health and activist communities has only become stronger. (Fig. 9).

Exploring useful questions and ethical anchors

The three case examples mentioned above, push the boundaries of what is conventionally understood as therapy. The relationship between facilitator/therapist and group, boundaries, level of self-disclosure and involvement, the unique co-facilitative relationships etc, would raise several questions in clinical supervision. As I reflected on the nature of this work, foundational questions were asked of me. Namely, what was the nature of the contract between the participants/ partners and myself? What are the foundations of my practice that influence how I approached the work? How did I play the role with which I was tasked? I found these questions to be profoundly useful in being able to critically evaluate my practice. In this section, I analyse the case examples beginning with these questions. I also draw on scholarship from the CATs and other fields to arrive at some ethical anchors that can be useful to myself and others as we undertake arts based care work beyond the frame of conventional psychotherapy.

Being part of an ecosystem of care for collective liberation

In a conversation with Tamilarasi (one of the members of the Kattaikkuttu women's group), I asked why they had invited me for this project. She said, "because I knew you and trusted you… You have come here so many times… I knew how you worked and I liked it… I felt you could help us decide what type of performance we wanted to make, why and how. I knew we could be a little free with you…. free about our thoughts, feelings, experiences…" (S.Tamilarasi personal communication, December, 2021). In the case of the work with women in physics, I was invited because, "Both Liz [an organiser] and I [Narasimhan] thought having a therapist there was important because many of these women are dealing with trauma…. dealing with daily experiences of exclusion and so on. The drama was also really important because it would help expression in the absence of a common verbal language– not everyone there was fluent in English— and also help the group bond" (S.Narasimhan, personal communication, December 10, 2021). The spaces to reflect were open groups with changing membership with multiple facilitators. The frame of those groups was specifically articulated and the goals, namely to support reflection and dialogue (in action). In their paper on the *Landscapes of Care*, Milligan and Wiles (2010) suggest viewing care as "involving networks instead of dyads" (p.738), move from looking at just care-providers, care-receivers and the nature of the care to looking at the spaces and contexts in which care is derived. If we see what we do as care work, and move away from the conventional psychotherapeutic emphasis on the therapeutic dyad, the motivations in all the case examples offered become entirely congruous with a therapeutic contract bounded by time and space with clear goals and specific roles.

Fig. 9. A closing ritual and moment of solidarity].

When we work with a community group that is not our own (especially if they are marginalized), an invitation by members of that group is crucially important. Sometimes invitations are made on behalf of participants by institutions or other bodies in positions of power. These invitations must be carefully assessed as they may be manifestations of "false generosity." A term coined by Paulo Freire (1970), false generosity refers to acts of charity or benevolence that ultimately continue systems of oppression and subjugation. That we do not collude with or perpetrate false generosity is critically important. "This lesson and this apprenticeship must come, however, from the oppressed themselves and from those who are truly solidary with them" (Freire, 1970, p.45).

The CATs have a troubling legacy of privileged therapists entering communities "in distress" with a desire to save, rescue or assuage their own guilt. The problems with this and approaching that community work with well-meaning benevolence serves to perpetuate systemic injustice has been articulated strongly (Napoli, 2019; Talwar, 2019). As a counterpoint, to come to this work from a desire for collective liberation (Freire, 1970; Watson, 1985) allows us the possibility to see how we are entwined in systems of injustice. Taking the position of collective liberation requires consistent self-work, which I cover later in this paper.

Community work can also involve addressing the needs of our own communities and their oppressions. The spaces to reflect, can be seen as such an evocation. In some cases, those oppressions come from outside– racism, ableism, patriarchy, castesim, religious supremacy, violence, dictatorship, genocide, cultural invasion, colonization etc. In others they seemingly come from within. Augusto Boal's *Rainbow of Desire* (1995) is predicated on the assumption that issues like loneliness, fear of emptiness can also be seen as oppressions, "The cops are in our heads, but the headquarters and barracks must be on the outside." (Boal, 1995, p.8). In our case, my fellow collaborators and I were creating a space that we needed in order to resist the oppression of larger political forces that moved to polarize and weaponize us. Regardless of our social location, there is work that to be done within our own communities and addressing our oppressions. Even in a community-based social justice paradigm the presence of a clearly articulated contract is important. However, the contract can be anchored in a motivation of collective liberation and being part of an ecosystem of care for the community and the individuals within it including ourselves.

Learning, critical self-reflection and radical (self) care

In their paper Hobart and Kneese frame "Radical Care" as a "critical survival strategy" for the precarious times we are in (Hobart & Kneese, 2020). Thus, work that we are evoked to do within our own communities is only therapeutically important but also a form of radical (self) care that is critical to our own survival and towards the project of collective

liberation.

Many CATs who advocate for an expanded paradigm for our fields, have highlighted the importance of undertaking an ongoing journey of learning and critical self-reflection (Hadley, 2013; Napoli, 2019; Sajnani et al., 2017; Soon & K.M., 2016; Talwar, 2019; Williams, 2016; among others). The Guidelines on cultural response/ability (Sajnani et al., 2016) for drama therapists recommend a "commitment to knowledge of self and other" (p. 144). Learning here, implies reading, discussion, arts-based explorations etc on issues pertaining to oppression and systemic power, stereotypes, biases and so on. Sometimes opportunities to learn come in formalized spaces like the university. Hadley (2013) and Sajnani et al. (2017) have both described pedagogical approaches in formalized university programmes for CATs that foreground critical theory and the interrogation of structural injustices. Williams (2016) describes drama exercises as being developed to help therapists uncover and challenge their unconscious racial biases. Opportunities to learn are also available in less formal spaces– study circles, reading groups, community arts projects, book readings and conversations.

In the Indian context, caste is an all-pervasive hierarchical structure that impacts all areas of life and access. Like race in the US context, caste and its effects too are "inescapable even amongst those who wish to fight for it" (Williams, 2016, p.20). As an upper caste woman, only intentional study and self-interrogation will help me develop a "critical consciousness" (Talwar, 2019) towards caste. There are numerous texts, films and performances on caste that have helped me step away from ignorance. A monthly learning circle offered by a movement therapy studio in association with an organisation that works with caste and mental health (Kandukuri, 2020), has been a rich and challenging space for me to explore and interrogate my knowledge and assumptions. Actively collaborating with Dalit and Bahujan[3] facilitators on projects have also contributed to a greater awareness. Yet, the work is ongoing and my mistakes are many. While there may be others willing to support my learning, the responsibility to learn and develop a consciousness is mine alone.

The three levels of collaboration

When working outside the paradigm of conventional psychotherapy; consulting, collaborating and building partnerships is profoundly important. The value of collaboration has been elucidated, within the CATs (Lu & Yuen, 2012; Soon & K.M., 2016, Talwar, 2019; among others). There are three levels of collaboration that are useful. 1) Between facilitators and participants; 2) Between facilitators and individuals, organisations and leaders that support the community directly and have had long term interest in the welfare of the community; and 3) Between facilitators and other facilitators, allied care workers, activists etc that contribute to the larger ecosystem of this work.

Collaboration between facilitator and participants creates a space of co-creation. In my own practice, I have found that entering a space by stating that I may have methodological competence (that participants will eventually develop) while participants have subject matter expertise is a useful starting point to begin the process of collaboration. America Bracho (2018) recommends seeing "community as co-worker" because while facilitators may care, being a member of a community and living that experience brings knowledge that is elusive to those who are not. Freire (1970) presents the notion of dialogical action as the means to achieve collective liberation. One fundamental characteristic of dialogical action is cooperation. I draw a parallel between Freire's notion of cooperation and the idea of collaboration introduced here. Freire (1970) states– "Dialogue, as essential communication, must underlie any cooperation" (p.168). "As opposed to the mythicizing practices of the dominant elites, dialogical theory requires that the world be unveiled (p.169).

The process of de-mystification is deeply applicable to CATs. In our work, are participants aware of why we facilitate a certain activity at a certain time? Are they able to see between the lines? One of the problems of claiming methodological expertise, as I suggested above, is if our methods remain "mystical." Thus, methodological competence, only along with a commitment to dialogue and demystification can promote sustainable collaboration. Another assertion from Freire (1970) germane to our discussion on collaboration is that through a process of dialogue and synthesis "contradictions in worldviews '' (between facilitator and participant) can be resolved without the "invasion" of one by the other, blur rather to "affirms the undeniable support each gives to the other" (p. 181). Forum theatre, cops in the head and many other techniques developed by Augusto Boal (1985, 1995) are examples of concrete methods developed to "do '' dialogical action. Training in these (and other) methods of community arts specifically developed to aid dialogical action, could be beneficial to CATs and participants in our practice.

The second level of collaboration is between facilitators and individuals, organisations and leaders that support the community directly and have had long term interest in the welfare of the community. This allows the work to be sustainable grounded in systems of care that are practically and conceptually accessible to the group. Lu and Yuen (2012) speak to how the consultative conversations lead them to arriving at their roles as "circle keeper" and drawing on knowledge systems of deep listening. This profoundly influenced their work. In my work with the Kattaikkuttu women's group, my conversations with Rajagopal and Hanne made me realise my privilege as an upper caste urban woman who could challenge certain gender norms in certain ways and also how I had to let go of some of the frameworks and structures I held.

The third level of collaboration, between facilitators and colleagues and allied professionals, allows us to connect with ways of addressing an issue that arises from a different paradigm. It ensures that we do not stand alone but are part of an ecosystem of care. That the participants we work with can benefit from support of different kinds. The legacy of our fields and the nature of our education as CATs and (in many cases) our social location colludes to perpetuating colonial and oppressive practices. Collaboration with those that have been intentionally engaged in this work longer and deeper than us (members of the community/ other allied practitioners), can help interrupt this tendency and offer a system of meaningful supervision in this expanded paradigm. Importantly, it is through this level of collaboration that we can ensure that we are supported and we support others engaged in care work.

Power, language and representation

It is important to recognise power structures and develop ways to negotiate power dynamics in our practice (Talwar, 2019) and ensure that collaborative relationships are egalitarian. Feminist post-structaralist, Sam Warner (2009) suggests that we can look at power as practice and not as a possession. While I do find the possession of power stemming from social location and role as important; looking at power as a practice allows me to understand that power is actively deployed and not simply held. Four expressions of power have been articulated (Pansardi, 2012; Pitkin, 1972; Starhawk, 1989; Stuart, 2019, among others) as power-over as domination/control, power-with as solidarity, power-within as personal ability/will, and power-to as ability to act. These dynamic expressions have proved useful to me in recognising how power is deployed in a moment. These dynamics can be explored using

[3] Dalit refers to people who belong to the lowest strata on the caste hierarchy who fall under the category of "scheduled castes" as part of the Indian Constitution. Bahujan directly translates to "the many" and refers to people belonging to multiple marginalized caste, tribe and religious backgrounds and constitute the demographic majority in India that holds little economic and social power. The terms Dalit and Bahujan are used widely in advocacy, activism and rights movements in India.

embodied images and the understanding that emerges, creating a shared vocabulary between myself and participants which enables us to call out/in power dynamics in action as we work together. Theatre of the oppressed and other community theatre processes have also developed sophisticated methods to play with power that we can do well to learn from.

The importance of language is also one that has been explicitly and implicitly spoken about by several CATs (Talwar, 2019; Sajnani et al., 2016; Lu & Yuen, 2012; Gopalakrishna et al., forthcoming; Makanya, 2014, among others). There are multiple dimensions of the language problem that apply to our work. First, is that of actual verbal language— how many of us are able to effectively facilitate in multiple languages? Of those, how many are indigenous and local languages? There are complex colonial legacies that have resulted in the erasure of us paying for survival with our native languages and culture. Second, is that any verbal language is in itself limited and limiting. This is a widely discussed problem and forms an important basis for the power of the CATs in mental health and particularly trauma work (Baker, 2006; Boldt & Paul, 2010; Harris, 2009; Lloyd, 2009; Munro & Mount, 1978; Thulin, 1997; Upton, 2009; among others). Third, languages of art and symbolism are too often seen as universal which result in the erasure of difference and cultural domination (Sajnani, 2012). Fourth, is the domination of the psychological language in the CATs. "Often, medical and clinical language has described the lives of clients in sceptical rather than affirmative ways" (Talwar, 2019, p. 58). These complexities are important for us to be aware of and counteract because power is practiced in and through language. Sajnani (2016) recommends making the work available in multiple languages and working with translators if necessary. Lark (2005) offers a powerful model of how art can be used as language in large group dialogue especially when working interracially. Talwar (2019) brings in the concept of "speaking subject" rather than an object of psychological and medical discourses'' (p.58). Sajnani et al. (2017) offer a distinction between clinical and cultural listening as a way to get a broader picture. Lu and Yuen (2012) and Gopalakrishna et al., (forthcoming) demonstrate how listening for, privileging and learning language of the community can unfold.

Listening for language and rhythms of the space can require us to let go of particular normative notions and expectations. Our own backgrounds and training are likely to come in the way. Makanya (2014) describes languages of care and health in South Africa and the ways they meet (or diverge from) the languages of care and health in drama therapy. Languages in this sense are paradigms of their own, systems of knowledge and thought. Honouring this is more than simply playing lip service, but also being able to operate within it. In the case of the Kattaikkuttu work, one moment where I was able to speak with the group in the same language was by embracing the model of the performance structure and restructure that was comfortable for them. One example where there was miscommunication was when Rajagopal cautioned me about the use of the Draupadi analogy in this rural context.

Work in the intersection of the arts, mental health and community work runs the risk of the work, the art or the participants, being instrumentalized (Sajnani et al., 2017 pp. 29), appropriated (Napoli, 2019; Sajnani et al., 2017) or exotified (Sajnani, 2012). Being vigilant about how the work or aspect of the work gets represented and "used" by community members, facilitators, sponsors, institutions or the state is of vital importance. Being in collaboration with participants and community members implies decisions around presentation/ representation be jointly made. Choices to "perform process" (Sajnani, 2012), highlighting the gaze of the audience/reader/author, asking questions of benefit and being conscious of voice are some ways that CATs have found to navigate around these pitfalls.

When our work is set in a paradigm that is community-based with social justice objectives, the role of the facilitator includes aspects of direct or indirect advocacy. In the case examples, I continue to be a visible advocate for social movements and the causes of these groups. When we see distress as an outcome of unjust systems of power or dominant narratives, working to dismantle those systems within the context of our work and beyond, becomes part of our mandate. Advocacy has been seen as desirable for ethical practice for CATs (Sajnani et al., 2017; Talwar, 2019). Therefore, advocacy is woven into the performance of our role as therapist in this expanded paradigm.

Finally, and most significantly, as with all ethical practice, it is important to explore our motivations, limitations and abilities to be able to do justice to the participants and communities we work with. We could be ill-suited to a piece of work for a multitude of reasons— our own social location, our abilities/ skills, concerns for our physical or emotional safety, life events etc. The ability to know when we are not suited to a particular piece of work and to take action in a way that is respectful to ourselves, our collaborators and the communities we work within, is a core anchor of ethical practice.

Conclusion

> *"Here again, the critical theorization of participation calls for an interweaving of the aesthetic with the social or political… I suggest that the solidarity…lies not so much in recognizing and finding the so-called 'other' or in respecting and celebrating differences, but rather in being prepared and willing to dispossess oneself of the fixity of one's ideas of the self, a potentially transformative gesture"* (Bala, 2018, pp. 22).

In just the last few months, the government of the Indian state of Karnataka (where I live and work) has enacted and proposed several laws that curb rights and further marginalize Muslims– banning hijab (head scarf) from educational institutions, outlawing Muslim shopkeepers from conducting business in the vicinity of Hindu temples, banning mosques from being able to announce their call to prayer etc. Groups of men claiming allegiance to Hindu supremacy groups have been on a rampage attacking Christian prayer meetings, groups of women and caste marginalized groups across the state. Journalists, students, teachers, activists, organisations that speak up against these discriminatory practices and atrocities or even just supporting their friends and neighbours, are being surveilled, arrested on false charges and held without bail. In the meantime, Karnataka has been ravaged by the COVID pandemic. Primary schools were shut down for nearly 24 months. Loss of life, livelihoods, homes and widespread uncertainty. The snapshot for other parts of the country is not very different. Scanning the world, we see political crises, war, widespread ecological devastation and a raging pandemic that has displaced millions. This is layered upon long existing structures of oppression– racism, casteism, patriarchy, ableism and so on, which in themselves have significant impact on mental health.

What does it mean to do mental health work at a time like this? How do we respond to distress in these times? In the Indian context, more community leaders and non-profit organisations are reaching out to creative arts therapists, seeing us as being able to create non-threatening spaces to undertake group based mental health work. CATs around the world are moved by the precariousness of our times and a desire to respond. For us to do justice to these invitations or evocations, it is imperative that we expand the frame of our practice beyond psychotherapy while ethically anchoring our work. The purpose of this article has been to share possible ethical anchors that can allow us to expand to include a community-based social justice perspective to our work as CATs.

At these socially, politically and ecologically precarious times, when we are called upon to participate in a radical act of care; What is the nature of our participation? Will we participate in perpetuating systems of oppression and subjugation? Are we willing to let go of our fixed ideas of self? Will we participate towards our collective liberation?

Acknowledgements

Thank you to S.Tamilarasi, R.Mahalakshmi, K.Venda, A.Bharathi and

S.Srimathy and the women in physics for the invitation, collaboration and opportunity to learn. Deepest gratitude to the community of artists, community artists and mental health practitioners in Bangalore who help me grow while keeping me grounded.

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